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FEATURED TACTIC: FOSTERING COMMUNICATION

Good communication between management and staff is essential in any well-run enterprise. It is one of the most effective strategies for building a sense of teamwork and high morale to encourage staff retention.

Two-way communication between management and clinicians fosters an exchange of ideas that helps produce well-thought-out decisions and procedures. It provides an opportunity to identify and address problems as they arise while channeling conflict and dissatisfaction in positive directions. It can also promote understanding that leads to improved relationships and deeper trust among clinicians and management.

A facility is most efficient and its health professionals are happiest when the primary goals of on-the-job communications are met: Clinicians understand the objectives of management and the reasons why these objectives are important; clinicians feel they can confide in managers who have their best interests at heart; managers hear and respond to clinician concerns; and management publicly recognizes clinicians for their dedication, skills and loyalty.

Among Indian health program administrators, there are many examples of communication strategies that help promote staff retention.

- Make it a priority to stay informed: The more managers are aware of what is happening in their departments, the more effectively they can respond to challenges and head off problems that might lead to turnover among staff. Seeking input from clinicians is one essential aspect of staying informed. In some instances, people in management may have limited or no clinical experience. Establishing effective communication through which medical staff members have input into decision making can result in better decisions, more efficient implementation of new ideas and significantly better morale among clinicians.
 - One Indian health clinic manager makes it a practice to chat with her clinicians frequently, asking for feedback on how they are

doing, how they think things are going in their departments and for suggestions on how workplace problems might be resolved, etc. This allows her to learn of clinicians who might be dissatisfied with aspects of their work and then arrange to meet with those health professionals and their supervisors to resolve any issues. When she learns that a clinician is considering leaving, she immediately meets with the clinician to determine what management can do to encourage the individual to remain on board.

- Encourage frank discussions with clinicians: Establishing a foundation of trust and confidentiality between managers and staff enables managers to learn personal details that might help to prevent a clinician's departure.
 - For example, one manager's conversations with a key clinician allowed her to learn that although he was very happy with his job, he was considering leaving because of the lack of contact with family members living elsewhere. When the CEO and clinical director of the facility were informed of the clinician's conflict, they met with him as soon as possible to discuss how his situation might be improved so that he would stay on. Eventually, through demonstrations of personal concern and expressions emphasizing the clinician's importance to the facility — and through flexibility in scheduling and leave policies — the facility was able to accommodate the clinician and retain his services.
- Have regular staff meetings: Group gatherings with all staff present can be beneficial, allowing for an exchange of opinions, the airing of complaints, strategic planning, conflict resolution, expressions of appreciation for high-quality work, etc. Such meetings offer another opportunity for two-way communication. Management has a chance to inform clinicians about important issues affecting the facility and the community and policies that might have an impact on their work. And because the meetings provide a formal setting in which clinicians can provide feedback, management can learn about what's working and where improvements can be made as well as resolve problems that could potentially lower morale and lead to staff departures.
- Publicly reward exceptional performance: Keeping morale high generally helps keep turnover low. An excellent way to make staff feel appreciated and motivated is to publicly acknowledge exceptional performance on the part of dedicated individuals through announcements to the staff, awards, special events, time off, monetary awards, etc. Pizza parties or staff get-togethers sponsored by management, for example, can help foster team spirit and boost morale. Staff fundraisers might be sponsored to pay for activities or perks for the staff.

- At one large Indian hospital, Nurse's Day is celebrated during which appreciation for the nurses' hard work is expressed with gifts and a special meal catered by the administrative staff. Expressions of management appreciation such as this can have a positive impact on morale.
- Use exit interviews to nip retention threats in the bud: Often, departing staff members are willing to reveal negative feelings and opinions about the facility in exit interviews and surveys. The information they provide can be an excellent way to identify issues that management can address with current staff and new hires to avoid possible turnover in the future.

Visit our [Retention website](#) for comprehensive information on employee retention tools, resources and other materials.

Do you have successful retention strategies and your own best practices to share with your colleagues? We value your input, so please send us your success stories or comments. You can also add a colleague to the mailing list or update us with changes in your email address. Contact us at: [CEO Retention Insights](#).



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